



RONIN GALLERY

KATSUKAWA

Early Masters of Kabuki Portraiture





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RONIN GALLERY

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Fig. 1: See page 22.

Shibaraku!

(Stop right there!)

Obscured beneath layers of crimson cloth, the actor Ichimura Uzaemon IX appears with a shout at the end of the raised walkway (fig.1). Against a curtain emblazoned with the crest of the Ichimura Theater, he contorts his face—pulling his mouth into a severe frown, knitting his brows, and crossing his eyes towards his flared nostrils—each furrow echoing the rolling curves of the crest and red *kumadori* makeup. Shunsho captures the actor frozen at the height of the audiences' anticipation. Just moments later, Uzaemon IX would stride through the audience on the raised walkway to vanquish the injustice occurring on stage. Overhead, suspended lanterns bear the crests of the cast, while box seats bear emblems of the teahouses that rented them. As daylight filters into the theater, fans shout and cheer, talk amongst themselves and purchase refreshments from vendors who make their way through the crowd. With the opening performance of the year underway, the kabuki season of 1788 had begun.

Complete with dance, music, chanting, and drama, kabuki theater serves a feast of dramatic pleasures. Today, the art form attracts an international audience as an UNESCO-designated form of intangible cultural heritage. However, in 18th-century Edo, the theater district was at the heart of the “floating world,” attracting Edo’s vast population of pleasure seekers across class lines. From fantastic costumes and striking makeup, to stylized movement and inventive staging, the kabuki stage celebrated the exuberant and the unexpected.

Ronin Gallery invites you to step into the theatrical world of 18th century kabuki. The exhibition *Katsukawa: Early Masters of Kabuki Portraiture* presents the brightest stars of the kabuki stage through the eyes of the artists of the Katsukawa School. Breaking away from the implied identities and simple palettes of the reigning Torii School, the Katsukawa artists brought individual actors to life. Through an unrelenting flair for the dramatic, attentive portraiture, and virtuosity of color, artists such as Shunsho, Shunko, and Shunei reframed the focus of theatrical prints from an actor’s role to the actor himself.

Setting the Stage: The Birth of Kabuki

The word “kabuki” comes from the verb *katabuku* or “to incline,” a term that, at the time, evoked the luxuriously dramatic, showy behavior at the heart of the art form.¹ The roots of kabuki can be traced to the turn of the 17th century and a mendicant priestess by the name of Okuni. Along with a group of women from the Great Shrine of Izumo, Okuni led performances of song and dance in the bathhouses and brothels of Kyoto.² Known at this time as *kabuki odori*, these raucous productions provided theatrical entertainment performed by sexually available actors. Prostitution was intrinsic to this early iteration of the art form. As these performances gained popularity, the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868) became increasingly worried about the excessive spending and dissident behavior that surrounded these productions. In 1629, the government tried to sever the connection between prostitution and kabuki by outlawing female performers. However, this measure proved unsuccessful. Young men filled the gap both onstage and off, inciting a second edict in 1652, which outlawed all but adult men in kabuki performances.³ Known as *yarou kabuki*, this evolution was the precursor to the kabuki we know today.

During the Genroku era (1688-1704), kabuki developed as an art form in the major cities of Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo, though its popularity reached beyond these urban centers.⁴ Incorporating aspects of various dance, music, and vocal traditions, kabuki grew increasingly expressive, extravagant, and spontaneous. By the early 18th century, innovations in stage design offered new dramatic opportunities. Additions such as the iconic *hanamichi*—the long walkway that extended through the audience from the back of the theater to the stage—trap doors, and revolving stages invited dynamic entrances, exits, and rapid set changes.⁵ Within Japan’s urban centers, kabuki adopted distinct regional character, each with heightened drama and sophistication as the century progressed. As productions raised their standards, audiences followed

suit. Theatergoers grew more discerning, holding rising expectations of actors' skill and production quality. Periodicals known as *yakusha hyoubanki*, generally published around the New Year, provided fans with summaries and play highlights, as well as a ranking of popular actors by talent.

An Afternoon in Tsukiji: 18th-century Kabuki and the Floating World

Catering to Edo's vast population, whether merchant-class *chonin* or elite samurai, the floating world revolved around the legalized prostitution district—the Yoshiwara—and the kabuki theater. While the Yoshiwara provided Edo's citizens with the pleasures of love, the Tsukiji district's theater row evolved to satisfy the every pleasure of theatergoers. Each year, the 11th month marked the beginning of the theater season. The opening performance of the season, the *kaomise* (literally “face showing”), featured the brightest stars in extravagant productions.

Beyond the stage, the district was home to a robust ecosystem of *shibaijaya* (theater teahouses). From refreshments and souvenirs for the masses, to actor meet-and-greets and luxury box rentals for prominent patrons, these teahouses played an integral role in Edo's theatrical realm. By the 1750s, ticket purchases were handled by the teahouses. It has been suggested that audiences spent three to five times more at these establishments than they did on the play ticket.⁶ Given the ever-imminent threat of fire in Edo, plays were held during the daylight. Despite this precaution, fires frequently ravaged the theaters. Fortunately, due to the simple construction of the theaters, they could be rebuilt and welcoming audiences within days.⁷

The Tsukiji district was home to three official theaters—the Nakamura-za, Ichimura-za and the Morita-za. Established in 1624, the Nakamura-za could hold up to 1500 guests (for reference, Tokyo's premier kabuki theater today, the Kabuki-za, can hold up to 1800).⁸ Theatergoers could choose from three seating options: lavishly expensive private box seats, standing room in front of the stage, and, for those seeking a real bargain, seats located behind the stage, where you could only see the actors' backs. The box seats wrapped around the theater in three levels. A far cry from theater decorum of a Broadway show today, these productions were rowdy affairs filled with audience chatter and vendors hawking refreshments and souvenirs. One 18th century account recalls how the accidental dropping of a sandal from a box seat incited such a fight in the standing room section that the production had to be paused.⁹

Kabuki plays could be divided into three main categories: historical plays (*jidaimono*), genre plays (*sewamono*), and dance pieces (*shosagoto*). The historical plays tended to focus on tales of the imperial courts and famous warriors, often drawing upon familiar characters and stories. Genre plays captured the adventures and misadventures of the common people, filled with tales of love-suicides, brazen *otokodate* (street warriors), and tales of triumph of the weak over the powerful. Dance pieces, as their name suggests, focused on elaborate

dance performance. Yet, across genres, playwrights and actors reveled in the unexpected, bringing together familiar stories, characters, and themes from disparate stories to the surprise and pleasure of the audience. For instance, at times, historical plays were not historical at all, instead they relayed current events transposed to an earlier era in order to evade government censorship.¹⁰ Though the plays themselves attracted theatergoers, it was the cast that fanned Edo's theater frenzy.

The Cult of Celebrity: Actors and Admirers

As audiences came to hold high expectations for performers in late 18th century, actors rose to the occasion. An example can be found in a 1776 production of the play "Kanadehon Chushingura." The actor Nakamura Nakazo I (pictured on p. 25) readied himself for his entrance just behind the curtain and poured a bucket of water over his head. As he stepped out in the tattered black clothes of a thief, he made his way through the crowd, wringing the water from his clothes.¹¹ All this to give the impression of a man battered by a rainstorm!

Through striking makeup, wigs, and costumes, actors maximized the drama of their performance. Upon powdered white faces, *kumadori* makeup not only exaggerated facial expressions, but also indicated the nature of the character. For example, the color red suggested justice, power, or virtue, swirling blues suggested villains and brown alluded to the supernatural.¹² Costumes also served this dual role. Certain patterns were closely associated with particular characters, none more recognizable than the larger-than-life draping costume of the "shibaraku" role (as seen in fig.1). With its enormous size and draping fabric, the costume was said to have been so heavy that it required three attendants to dress the actor in question.¹³ Though actors were expected to provide their own costumes, loans were available through their theater's wardrobe room. Given the opulence of kabuki costumes, these collections regularly attracted government officials on the hunt for broken sumptuary regulations.¹⁴

Kabuki actors were highly specialized. Born into theatrical families, actors trained from childhood to refine their skill and cultivate their specialty. As women were banned from the stage in 1629, certain male actors specialized in female characters (*onnagata*). For some star *onnagata*, their specialty expanded beyond the stage and they even became icons of female fashion and innovators of beauty trends.¹⁵ In prints, these actors can be differentiated from other female figures by the purple fabric (*murasaki boshi*) covering the shaved pate. For actors specializing in male roles, they usually focused on an acting style, role, or even subtype of character. For example, villains could be broken into evil lovers or true villains. Heroes could take the form of rough-and-tumble (*aragoto*) or softer (*wagoto*) male leads. Actors typically worked on contract with a specific theater. Acutely aware that a production's success depended on the cast more than the play itself, theaters paid their talent generously. Salaries ballooned as high as 2000 ryo for certain stars and put considerable financial strain on the theaters (for context, a shop assistant at this time would make three to five ryo annually).¹⁶

As theatergoers today idolize their favorite actors, Edo's theater enthusiasts fostered a zealous fandom that crossed social classes. When the actor Ichikawa Yazo II accidentally stepped in a bucket of water at the edge of the stage, a member of his passionate fanbase took a portion of the water to drink.¹⁷ One 18th century regional lord's passion for the theater burned so bright that the professional theater alone could not satisfy him. He supplemented formal performances with in-home productions acted out by his servants, whom he would rank by their talent in homemade *yakusha hyoubanki*.¹⁸ Audiences could indulge their passion through mementos such as "cotton kimono, towels, and scarves printed with an actor's crest, or samples of an actor's calligraphy on fans or poem papers."¹⁹ These souvenirs offered a trace of the actor, while ukiyo-e artists captured an actor's likeness.

The Idol and the Individual: Actor Portraiture and the Katsukawa School

Though today's Broadway stars are only a click away, Edo-period audiences collected *yakusha-e* (actor prints) as one way to indulge in their passion for theater. Kabuki and ukiyo-e evolved in tandem, each art form adapting to the ever-changing tastes of their audiences. Publishers kept pace, releasing prints to coincide with the current blockbusters and stars du jour—both advertising the performance and providing a souvenir for audiences. It has been suggested that actor subjects account for at least a third of all ukiyo-e.²⁰ Through the first half of the 18th century, the Torii School dominated *yakusha-e*. At the hands of artists such as Kiyonobu and Kiyomasu, the Torii School designed billboards, playbills, as well as single sheet actor prints. Distinguished by the undulating lines and rounded, muscular limbs, Torii School actor portraits depicted specific actors, but relied on actors' family crests and familiar costumes to identify popular talents and famous roles. Starting in the 1760s, the artists of the Katsukawa School took the genre a step further as they explored the individuality of each idol.

Named for its founder, Katsukawa Shunsho, the Katsukawa School redefined the field of actor prints in the late 18th century through the introduction of realistic portraiture. Frequently working in the *hosoban* (about 13 x 5 in) format, Katsukawa artists presented actors at the height of the scene's drama, imbuing each portrait with the celebrity's distinctive facial features, body types, and tangible emotion. While these kabuki subjects retained identifying crests and costumes, the actors were no longer idolized types, but recognizable individuals. What's more, as Katsukawa artists made full use of the latest color innovations of the 1760s, they brought the theater to life in vivid color. These "likeness pictures" (*nigao-e*) set the Katsukawa School apart from their contemporaries and allowed them to surpass the reigning Torii artists in popularity. This fresh approach to portraiture laid the groundwork for the increasing realism of ukiyo-e's "golden age" at the turn of the 19th century.

From snarling villains to graceful *onnagata*, the Katsukawa School immortalized the kabuki stars of the late 18th century both as actors and as

individuals. Each portrait invited theater enthusiasts to not only relive the thrill of a surprise entrance, the thwarting of a villain, or the righting of an injustice, but also appreciate the skill and personality of the actor. Katsukawa artists answered a public obsession for all things kabuki—a passion shared by Katsukawa Shunsho himself.²¹ Though today time has obscured some of the rich cultural context embedded in these prints, their visual impact remains undiminished as their vibrant theatricality defies the passage of centuries. From distant stars to storied roles, the actor portraiture of the Katsukawa School allows contemporary viewers a glimpse of the 18th-century kabuki stage long after the curtain closed.

Notes

1. Masakatsu Gunji, "The History and Special Features of Kabuki" in *Kabuki through the Theater Prints: Collection of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, James A. Michener Collection* (Japan: Azabu Museum of Arts and Crafts, 1990), 9.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*, 10.
4. *ibid.*, 12.
5. The use of the *hanamichi* traces to c. 1700, while the trap door and revolving stage were developed in Osaka c. 1758. *ibid.*, 11.
6. Tove Björk, "Edo Kabuki and Money," in *Andon* 96 (May 2014: 65-79), 96.
7. Timothy T. Clark, "Edo Kabuki in the 1780s," in *The Actor's Image*, ed. Timothy Clark and Osamu Ueda (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1994), 28.
8. Björk, 68.
9. Clark, "Edo Kabuki in the 1780s," 36.
10. Timothy T. Clark, "Entries and Plates," in *The Actor's Image*, ed. Timothy T. Clark and Osamu Ueda (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1994), 128.
11. *ibid.*, 212.
12. Matthew Welch, et al., *Worldly Pleasures, Earthly Delights: Japanese Prints from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2011), 91.
13. Timothy Clark, "Katsukawa Shunsho: Ukiyo-e Paintings for the Samurai Elite" in *Designed for Pleasure: the World of Edo Japan in Prints and Paintings, 1680-1860*, ed. Julia Meech, et al. (New York: Asia Society and Japanese Art Society of America, 2008), 112.
14. Clark, "Entries and Plates," 264.
15. *ibid.*, 266.
16. Björk, 71.
17. Welch et al., 91.
18. Clark, "Edo Kabuki in the 1780s," 28.
19. *ibid.*, 45.
20. Donald Jenkins, "Actor Prints: Shunsho, Buncho, and the Katsukawa School: Two Poles of the Floating World," in *The Actor's Image*, ed. Timothy Clark and Osamu Ueda (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1994), 12.
21. Clark, "Edo Kabuki in the 1780s," 26.

Glossary

Aragoto

“rough style;” acting style marked by dynamic and exaggerated performance

Bijin-ga

pictures of beautiful women

Chonin

“townspeople;” the common people of Edo

Hanamichi

wooden walkway that extends from the curtain at the back of the theater through the audience to the stage

Hosoban

narrow print size measuring roughly 13 x 6 inches

Jidaimono

historical plays; one of three main categories of kabuki plays

Kabuki odori

origin of kabuki; dance form popularized by Okuni in 17th century Kyoto

Kaomise

“face showing;” opening performance of the kabuki season

Kibyoshi

popular illustrated fiction published from the late 18th to early 19th century, identifiable by its yellow cover

Kumadori

kabuki stage makeup

Mon

crest; may identify a family or individual

Murasaki boshi

purple cloth worn by an *onnagata* to cover his shaved pate

Nigao-e

“likeness pictures;” portraiture true to the subject’s appearance

Oban

common print size measuring approximately 10 x 15 inches

Okubi-e

“big head pictures;” bust portraits

Onnagata

kabuki actor who specializes in female roles

Otokodate

street warriors; challenged corruption and fought for justice, but were often ruffians

Ryo

gold currency unit during the Edo period (1603-1868)

Sewamono

genre plays; one of three main categories of kabuki plays

Shibaijaya

theater teahouses

Shosagoto

dance drama (also known as *furigoto*); one of three main categories of kabuki plays

Ukiyo-e

“pictures of the floating world;” woodblock prints that captured the pleasure-driven, merchant-class culture that flourished in Edo between 1603 and 1868

Wagoto

“soft style;” acting style marked by realistic gesture and speech

Yakusha-e

actor portraits

Yakusha hyoubanki

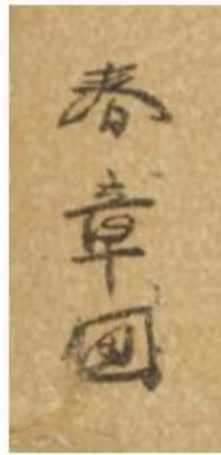
illustrated periodicals that ranked actors by skill

Yarou kabuki

early form of kabuki featuring adult male actors; precursor to modern kabuki

Selected Artists of the Katsukawa School

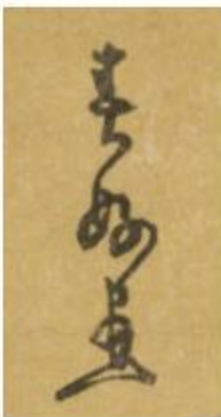
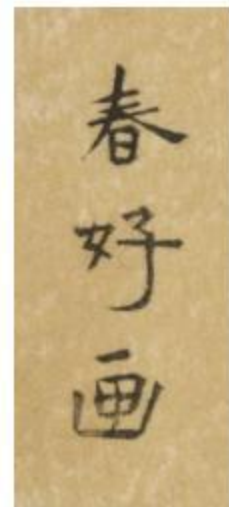
Shunsho (1726-1792)



Katsukawa Shunsho is one of the great masters of ukiyo-e. As founder of the Katsukawa School, he was a pivotal print artist, accomplished painter, and influential teacher. Born in 1726, little is known about Shunsho's personal life. He came to Edo to study haiku, poetry, and painting under Miyagawa Shunsui. It is thought that Shunsho began to design actor prints (*yakusha-e*) around 1768. In these prints, he turned away from the idealized figures of the Torii School in favor of recognizable subjects. From subtle facial features to characteristic expressions, Shunsho brought theatrical stars to life through realistic portraiture. As he focused on the individual actor rather than the role portrayed, Shunsho marked a distinct shift in the actor print genre. From his *hosoban* actor portraits to his illustrated books, Shunsho introduced individualism to *yakusha-e*. This legacy flourished under talented students such as Shuncho, Shunko, Shunei, and Shunro (aka Hokusai).

Shunsho's success reached beyond *yakusha-e*. He explored other ukiyo-e genres, producing many *shunga* albums, illustrated books, warrior prints, and images of sumo wrestlers throughout his career. He was also highly successful in the field of *bijin-ga*, or "pictures of beautiful women," and devoted his later years to painting for elite patrons. Shunsho's early prints are not signed. Instead, they are sealed with the character "hayashi" enclosed within the shape of a bronze jar (*tsubo*). This seal belonged to Hayashiya Shichiemon, the publisher with whom Shunsho lived with for a time.

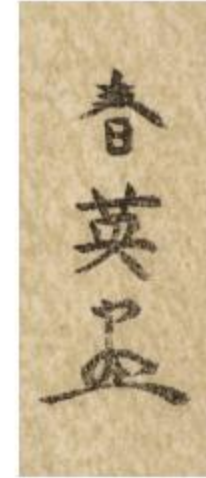
Shunko (1743-1812)



Born as Kiyokawa Denjiro, Katsukawa Shunko began designing prints and illustrated books in 1771. An early student of Shunsho, at times Shunko signed his work with jar seal similar to that of his teacher, earning him the nickname "little tsubo." It is likely that he was the senior pupil in Shunsho's studio at the time that Hokusai (then known as Shunro) was a student. According to Hokusai's own account, Shunko was a firm but influential teacher.¹ Shunko is credited with the creation of "big head" *okubi-e* portraiture. He began to experiment with this format in 1780, depicting each actor's face and upper chest. He later explored the concept further with a similar series in the *oban* size. These works are commonly considered the forerunners to the *okubi-e* of the mid-1790s. In his early 40s, Shunko suffered a stroke and lost use of his right side. Though he stopped printing at this time, he continued his career as a painter, working with his left hand and signing his work "go sahitsusai" or "studio of the left brush."²

Shunei (1762-1819)

A student of Shunsho, Katsukawa Shunei was a prolific and successful woodblock print artist. Most active from the mid-1780s through the 1790s, his earliest known work is an illustrated book published in 1782. He is credited as one of the first artists to popularize the emerging *okubi-e*, or “big head,” style portraits. In addition to actor prints, Shunei designed studies of sumo wrestlers. A contemporary of Toyokuni I and Sharaku, Shunei’s prints are distinctive in their active, yet balanced compositions and dramatic flair.



Shunjo (act. c. 1778-1787)

Active during the late 18th century, Katsukawa Shunjo was a pupil of Shunsho. Though little is known about his life, Shunjo is considered a talented member of the Katsukawa school, noted for his attention to gesture and incorporation of stage props into his compositions. Active primarily during the mid-1780s, Shunjo produced single-sheet actor prints in the Katsukawa style and illustrated many *kibyoshi* (popular illustrated fiction books identifiable by their yellow cover) and play bills. Though his birth date remains unknown, he is known to have died in 1787.



Notes

1. Timothy Clark, “Katsukawa Shunsho: Ukiyo-e Paintings for the Samurai Elite,” in *Designed for Pleasure: The World of Edo Japan in Prints and Paintings, 1680-1860*, ed. Julia Meech, Jane Oliver (New York: Asia Society and Japanese Art Society of America, 2008), 95.
2. Donald Jenkins, “Actor Prints: Shunsho, Buncho, and the Katsukawa School: Two Poles of the Floating World,” in *The Actor's Image*, ed. Timothy Clark and Osamu Ueda (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1994), 25.



Kabuki Actor Arashi Sangoro II

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1775
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208363

**Kabuki Actor Ichikawa
Danzo IV**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1780
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12" x 5.5"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208364





**Kabuki Actor Osagawa
Tsuneyo II**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1786
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.25" x 5.75"
Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal
Provenance: Haviland
Reference No: JP-208361

**Kabuki Actor Segawa
Kikunojo III as Onami
Disguised as Dragon Princess**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1778
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Provenance: Haviland
Reference No: JP-208176

Another impression of this print can be found in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. According the AIC, this design illustrates the play "Saki Masuya Ume no Kachidoki," performed at the Ichimura Theater in the eleventh month of 1778.





**Kabuki Actor Segawa
Kikunojo III as Tomoe Gozen**

Artist: Shunsho

Date: c. 1786

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 12.5" x 5.5"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JPR-100370

Another impression of this print can be found in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. According to the MFA, this design illustrates the kabuki play "Onna Musha Kiku no Senyoki."

**Kabuki Actor Ichikawa
Danjuro V as Taruhiro Goro**

Artist: Shunsho

Date: c. 1775

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 12.25" x 5.5"

Signature: Shunsho ga

Provenance: Michener

Reference No: JP-111366

Other impressions of this print can be found in institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the British Museum. According to the British Museum, this design illustrates the play "Kikujido Shuen no Iwaya" performed at the Morita theater on the 1st day of the 11th month of 1775.





**Kabuki Actor Ichimura
Uzaemon IX as Sasaki Tadaomi
Araoka Genta in a Shibaraku
Scene**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1778
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208359

Other impressions of this print can be found in institutions such as Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (printed with alternative color). According to the MFA, this design illustrates the play "Sakimasu ya Mume no Kachidoki," performed at the Ichimura Theater.

Kabuki Actor Otani Hiroji III

Artist: Shunsho

Date: c. 1772

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 12.5" x 5.5"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Signature: Shunsho ga

Provenance: Michener

Reference No: JP-111374





**Kabuki Actor Segawa
Kikunojo III**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1775
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208365

Another impression of this print can be found in the collection of Harvard Art Museum.

**Kabuki Actor Nakamura
Nakazo I**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1779
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 6"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208362





**Kabuki Actor Ichikawa
Monnosuke II as Soga no Goro**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1780
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208366

Another impression of this print can be found
in the collection of the Museum Volkenkunde,
Leiden.

**Kabuki Actor Nakajima
Mihoemon II**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1771
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 11.75" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208360





**Kabuki Actor Nakamura
Sukegoro II**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1770
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP1-21648

**Kabuki Actor Nakamura Riko
as Gaku no Osan**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1780
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Provenance: Michener
Reference No: JP-111370





LEFT

Kabuki Actor Iwai Hanshiro IV

Artist: Shunsho
 Date: c. 1780
 Medium: Woodblock print
 Size: 12.25" x 5.5"
 Signature: Shunsho ga
 Reference No: JP-208368

RIGHT

The Warrior Omori Hikoshichi Carrying a Female Demon

Artist: Shunsho
 Date: c. 1772
 Medium: Woodblock print
 Size: 10.5" x 7.5"
 Signature: Katsukawa Shunsho ga
 Reference No: JP-208370

Legends provided rich inspiration for kabuki plays. In this design, Shunsho portrays one such tale. In the 14th century story, the warrior Omori Hikoshichi came across a beautiful woman on the road and offered to carry her towards her destination. As he approached the mountains, the beauty transformed into a demon—the spirit of his slain enemy—and tried to carry him away. Another impression of this print can be found in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.





**Kabuki Actor Segawa
Kikunojo III**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1780
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.25" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP-208369

**Kabuki Actor Bando
Matataro IV (?)**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1775
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 11.75" x 5.25"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP5075





**Kabuki Actor Otani
Hiroemon III as Renegade
Monk Dainichibo**

Artist: Shunsho
Date: c. 1777
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.4" x 5.8"
Signature: Shunsho ga
Reference No: JP5073

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (complete diptych). The MFA suggests that this design illustrates the kabuki play "Tsukisenu Haru Hagoromo Soga," performed at the Ichimura Theater in the third month of 1777.

Kabuki Actor Otani Hiroji III

Artist: Shunsho

Date: c. 1770

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 11.75" x 5.5"

Seals: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JP-208367





**Kabuki Actor Ichikawa
Danjuro V as Renegade
Buddhist Monk Wantetsu**

Artist: Shunsho

Date: c. 1778

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 11.45" x 5.75"

Reference No: JP-94091

Other impressions of this print can be found in institutions such as the Art Institute of Chicago, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The AIC suggests that this design illustrates the play "Date Nishiki Tsui no Yumitori," performed at the Morita Theater in the Eleventh Month of 1778.

**Kabuki Actor Bando
Mitsugoro I as Soga no Juro**

Artist: Shunsho

Date: c. 1778

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 12" x 6"

Signature: Shunsho ga

Reference No: JP2001

Another impression of this print can be found as the center sheet of a triptych in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. According to the MFA, this design illustrates a production of the play "Kaido Ichi Yawaragi Soga" staged at the Nakamura Theater in the first month of 1778.





LEFT

Warrior Watonai Subduing a Tiger

Artist: Shunei
Date: c. 1790
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 15" x 10"
Publisher: Izutsuya
Signature: Shunei ga
Reference No: JP-207802

Kokusenya Kassen (*The Battle of Coxinga*) was a famous legend that inspired kabuki productions. In this design, Shunei presents the warrior Watonai. While returning from a journey to China, he encountered a tiger. Rather than slay the beast, he charmed and subdued his way to safety.

RIGHT

Kabuki Actor Otani Oniji III

Artist: Shunei
Date: c. 1792
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12" x 5.25"
Seals: Vever
Signature: Shunei ga
Provenance: Vever
Reference No: JP-111392

Another impression of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.





LEFT

**Kabuki Actor Wakayama
Tomisaburo**

Artist: Shunei
Date: c. 1798
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 13" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunei ga
Reference No: JP-101058

Another impression of this print can be found in
the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

RIGHT

Kabuki Actor Ichikawa Yaozo III

Artist: Shunei
Date: c. 1794
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 13.25" x 9"
Seals: Kiwame
Publisher: Uemura Yohei
Signature: Shunei ga
Reference No: JP-208371





春英画



LEFT

**Kabuki Actor Sawamura
Sojuro III as Nagoya Sanza**

Artist: Shunei

Date: c. 1794

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 15.25" x 10"

Publisher: Harimaya Shinshichi

Seals: Kiwame

Signature: Shunei ga

Provenance: Amstutz

Reference No: JP-208374

It has been suggested that this design portrays the actor in a performance of the play "Keisei Sanbon Karakasa," performed at the Miyako Theater in the seventh month of 1794.

RIGHT

Kabuki Actor as Yaoya Oshichi

Artist: Shunei

Date: c. 1794

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 12.5" x 5.5"

Signature: Shunei ga

Reference No: JP-208373

While actors usually wear just one *mon*, or crest, the unidentified actor in this design features two. In addition to the family crest on the right sleeve, the actor wears a second *mon* on his left—a folded letter enclosed in a circle. This is the crest of Arashi Kiyosaburo, the actor credited with the popularization of the role in 1709. As fellow performers assumed the role of Oshichi, they often wore the crest of Arashi Kiyosaburo as tribute.





Kabuki Actor in a Female Role

Artist: Shunei
Date: c. 1792
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.5" x 5.75"
Publisher: Harimaya Shinshichi
Signature: Shunei ga
Reference No: JP-208375

Kabuki Actor Kataoka Nizaemon VII

Artist: Shunei

Date: c. 1796

Medium: Woodblock print

Seals: Vever

Signature: Shunei ga

Publisher: Enomotoya Kichibei (Hoeido)

Provenance: Vever

Reference No: JP-208372

The Art Institute of Chicago suggests that this print could depict Kataoka Nizaemon VII as Hayakawa Matabei in a production of the play "Furiwake-gami Aoyagi Soga," staged at the Miyako Theater during this first month of 1796. Other impressions of this print can be found in the National Diet Library, Tokyo, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, and the Art Institute of Chicago.





LEFT

**Kabuki Actor Sawamura
Sojuro III as Hayano Kanpei**

Artist: Shunei

Date: c. 1783

Medium: Painting

Size: 10.5" x 7"

Reference No: JP-208171

Another impression of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The MFA suggests that this design illustrates the actor in a production of the play "Kanadehon Chushingura" staged at the Nakamura Theater in the fifth month of 1783.

RIGHT

**Kabuki Actor Matsumoto
Koshiro IV**

Artist: Shunei

Date: c. 1785

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 12.25" x 5.75"

Signature: Shunei ga

Reference No: JP-208376

Other impressions of this print can be found in Waseda University Theatre Museum, Tokyo, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (diptych).





LEFT

**Kabuki Actors Nakayama
Tomisaburo I and Ichikawa
Danjuro V**

Artist: Shunko

Date: c. 1790

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 12.5" x 11"

Signature: Shunko ga

Reference No: JP-208357

Another impression of the right sheet of this
diptych can be found in the collection of
Harvard Art Museum.

RIGHT

**Kabuki Actor Segawa
Kikunojo III**

Artist: Shunko

Date: c. 1780

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 13" x 6"

Signature: Shunko ga

Reference No: JP1-43942





**Kabuki Actor Sawamura
Sojuro III**

Artist: Shunko
Date: c. 1788
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 13" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunko ga
Reference No: JP-208268

Another impression of this print can be found as part of a diptych in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. They suggest this design depicts the actor in the play "Keisei Azuma Kagami," staged at the Nakamura Theater in the second month of 1788.

**Kabuki Actor Ichikawa
Danjuro V as Medicine Peddler**

Artist: Shunko
Date: c. 1785
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12.75" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunko ga
Provenance: Michener
Reference No: JP-111372





**Kabuki Actor Ichikawa
Danjuro V as Matsuomaru**

Artist: Shunko
Date: c. 1780
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 12" x 5.25"
Signature: Shunko ga
Reference No: JPR1-43937

**Kabuki Actor Sawamura
Sojuro III**

Artist: Shunjo
Date: c. 1780
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 13" x 5.75"
Signature: Shunjo ga
Provenance: Michener
Reference No: JP-111368

Another impression of this print can be found in
the Tokyo National Museum.



Picture Book of Stage Fans

Published in 1770 by Kariganeya Ihei, *Picture Book of Stage Fans* (*Ebon Butai Ogi*) presents the brightest kabuki stars of the day. Spanning three volumes, each page features a half-length portrait of an actor framed within the outline of a fan. As a collaborative project from the brushes of Katsukawa Shunsho (1726-1792) and Ippitsusai Buncho (fl.1765-1792), this illustrated book marks an early exploration of *nigao-e*, or “likeness pictures.” In each portrait, the artist identifies the actor with his stage name and family crest, yet also through distinctive aspects of his physical appearance and expression. This interest in the recognizable individual drove the success of the Katsukawa School in the second half of 18th century and laid the groundwork for the increasing realism of ukiyo-e at the turn of the century.



TOP

Kabuki Actor Sakata Kuniyachi

Artist: Shunsho
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 9.5" x 6"
Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal
Reference No: JP1406

BOTTOM

Kabuki Actor Iwai Hanshiro

Artist: Shunsho
Medium: Woodblock print
Size: 9.5" x 6"
Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal
Reference No: JP1401





TOP LEFT

Kabuki Actor Ichikawa Tomozo

Artist: Shunsho

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 9.5" x 6"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JP1400

BOTTOM LEFT

Kabuki Actor Yoshizawa Sakinosuke

Artist: Shunsho

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 9.5" x 6"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JP1404

BOTTOM RIGHT

Kabuki Actor Bando Matataro

Artist: Shunsho

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 9.5" x 6"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JP1433





TOP LEFT

Kabuki Actor Ichikawa Shoemon

Artist: Shunsho

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 9.5" x 6"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JP1408

TOP RIGHT

Kabuki Actor Nakamura Dengoro

Artist: Shunsho

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 9.5" x 6"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JP1415

BOTTOM LEFT

Zamoto (Theater Manager) Uzaemon

Artist: Shunsho

Medium: Woodblock print

Size: 9.5" x 6"

Seal: Hayashi in jar-shaped seal

Reference No: JP1434

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